

in one way or another, to Agent Orange, and its effects have been a subject of controversy for more than three decades. Today, the U.S. Veterans Administration recognizes 12 diseases and 1 birth defect related to herbicide exposure and recently added 3 more diseases as eligible for compensation from the Federal Government.

Thanks to the efforts of U.S. veterans who suffered from the effects of dioxin, their needs have been recognized and are finally being addressed. But in Vietnam, where the government lacks the resources to either clean up the residual dioxin contamination or to adequately assist those who have suffered health problems, the legacy of Agent Orange remains a difficult and emotional subject for U.S.-Vietnamese relations.

On the one hand, the Government of Vietnam for years blamed Agent Orange for seemingly any case of birth defect in the country, no matter how farfetched. On the other hand, the U.S. Government consistently denied causation between Agent Orange and birth defects in Vietnam and refused to accept any responsibility for the alleged harm. For years, the issue remained a contentious one for our countries.

Then about a decade ago, thanks to an initiative funded by the Ford Foundation and with the participation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, research was done that went a long way toward dispelling the myths about the extent of contamination, as well as identifying where the most serious threats remain. Some 28 “hot spots” of varying degrees of dioxin contamination were located where Agent Orange had been stored or handled, often resulting in extensive spills and leakage into the soil or groundwater, from where it moved up the food chain. The sites with the worst contamination are the Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Phu Cat airports. For example, in the area of the Da Nang Airport, dioxin levels in soil, sediment, and fish were documented as 300 to 400 times higher than what is considered safe. And the contamination is passed genetically from one generation to the next.

In 2006, the same year that a Joint Advisory Committee of U.S. and Vietnamese Government agencies was established to discuss ways to address this problem, the Department of State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which I chair, provided \$3 million for “environmental remediation of dioxin-contaminated sites and related health activities in Vietnam” for fiscal year 2007. An additional \$3 million was provided for fiscal year 2009 and the same amount again for fiscal year 2010. The 2010 Supplemental Appropriations Act includes \$12 million for these purposes, and S. 3676, the Senate version of the fiscal year 2011 Department of State and Foreign Operations bill, which was reported by the Appropriations Committee on July 29, 2010, includes another \$15 million. Chairman FALEOMAVEGA of the House Sub-

committee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment has held two hearings on the issue, and in July, Senators HARKIN and SANDERS traveled to Vietnam and visited the Da Nang site.

The Government of Vietnam also provides tens of millions of dollars for small monthly payments to persons with disabilities believed to have been caused by Agent Orange, as well as some funds for dioxin cleanup. The Ford Foundation has provided \$14 million for activities in Vietnam related to Agent Orange. These include dioxin containment at the Da Nang Airport, services and opportunities for people with disabilities in eight particularly affected provinces, and to support the work of the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin, a binational committee of scientists, educators, and policy analysts. Other U.S. philanthropic organizations, including the Gates Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, as well as several governments and United Nations agencies, have also contributed, while U.S. nongovernmental organizations have implemented programs to deliver services to affected people. American companies have also been exploring greater business partnerships with Vietnam and contributing to education and other efforts. The Dialogue Group's Plan of Action calls for a 10-year effort that would combine continuing U.S. and Vietnamese Government support with support from nonprofits and corporations that have business relationships in Vietnam. These would all be helpful steps.

My own interest in addressing the legacy of Agent Orange evolved from the use of the Leahy War Victims Fund in Vietnam to assist persons with disabilities, primarily victims of landmines and other unexploded ordnance left over from the war, and my efforts to address the problem of civilian casualties and to assist innocent victims of the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since 1988, through the U.S. Agency for International Development and implementing partners, including the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped, the U.S. Government has provided tens of millions of dollars through the Leahy fund for medical, rehabilitation and vocational assistance, training, and equipment. However, no one knows how many of the beneficiaries of these programs may have been disabled as a result of exposure to Agent Orange, and large areas of the country still lack services for people with disabilities.

In 2007, it was Bobby Muller, the former president of Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, who had been instrumental, indeed indispensable, in promoting postwar reconciliation and the eventual normalization of relations with Vietnam, who suggested to me that the U.S. Government needed to do something about Agent Orange. Vietnam and the United States were mak-

ing progress on so many fronts, from locating the remains of MIAs to cooperation on HIV/AIDS and expanding tourism and trade, that it made no sense for the issue of dioxin contamination to remain a sore point. I agreed that we should try to turn this contentious issue into one on which both countries could work together.

Since then, while it has taken far longer than I would have liked to develop a plan for utilizing the funds, the administration is now at the point of identifying the most cost-effective remediation technique for Da Nang, and, as I have noted, we are fortunate that in the meantime other donors have joined this effort.

We also need to look forward. In Senate Report 111-237 accompanying S. 3676, the Appropriations Committee directs USAID, in consultation with the Department of State, the Government of Vietnam, and other interested parties, to develop a multiyear plan for Agent Orange activities in Vietnam. This plan, which should reflect input from interested parties with a history of working on this issue such as the Ford Foundation and the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange/Dioxin, should identify the key activities for the environmental remediation and health/disability components of this effort, indicate how U.S. funding will be coordinated with and complementary to the contributions of other donors and how nongovernmental organizations, including nonprofits and businesses, can play constructive roles. It should set clear goals, benchmarks for measuring progress, and estimated costs associated with these activities. In doing so, we will not only chart our way forward, we will demonstrate to the Government of Vietnam and its people that we intend to continue to play a central role in this effort.

To that end, I want to emphasize the importance of the health component. While the soil and sediment remediation is critical and has received the most attention, it would be hard to overstate the importance the Vietnamese give to addressing the needs of people who have been harmed. While it may not be possible to definitively diagnose Agent Orange as the cause of a person's disability, the plan should include surveys or other steps to locate people who suffer from disabilities that may have been caused by dioxin, so they can be helped. An expanded involvement by nonprofit organizations, businesses, and philanthropies remains key to this humanitarian effort, and there is no longer any reason for hesitancy on the part of U.S. companies in Vietnam in supporting such work.

After a tragic war that left deep scars in both Vietnam and the United States, we have become partners on a wide range of issues. We still have our differences, particularly concerning human rights, but we want to make progress in whatever ways we can. The legacy of Agent Orange, for years an issue that divided us, is now one that is bringing us together.